



The study of traditions has for the most part been grounded in neatly bounded regions. Indeed, it can be said that the understanding of traditions of certain built environments has been as influenced by regional genres of research — what in the U.S. academy is called “area studies” — as it has been by the mandates of related disciplines.

The current moment of globalization necessitates and provokes a remapping of such intellectual cartographies. The restructuring of nation-states, the emergence of megaglobal institutions, and the speeding up of labor, investment and commercial flows have all served to unsettle old regions and borders. Contemporary debates about space and place seek to take these changes into account by drawing attention to the traditions endangered through migration, diasporas, and hybrid cultures. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that despite porous borders and shape-shifting regions, despite e-freedom and e-trade, social and spatial fixities continue to intensify.

In a world bearing the premise of global citizenship, the legacy of political borders — and thus of identities — is creating unprecedented tensions between groups of people, which is manifested in practices of exclusion, segregation and conflict. Thus, border stories have increasingly become identity stories. But the border has always had a dual role, which, while defining the “other,” has simultaneously validated the self. It is not surprising that the very borders which once served to exclude and differentiate have now reemerged as celebrated icons of cultural overlap and political mediation.

Drawing upon its interdisciplinary and cross-cultural strengths, IASTE is an ideal space from which to interrogate these imagined fixities of “tradition” and “region.” We propose a reimagining of these intellectual and spatial boundaries.

[un] bounding tradition: the tensions of borders and regions

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